

Construction pushes businesses to come up with creative ways to lure customers

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

As irritating as road construction can be for drivers, it can be harder on businesses. Better roads and sidewalks boost economic development in the long run, but a current project that has torn up two blocks of Hermiston Avenue shows that progress can come with a heavy price in the short term.

"It's really impacted business because people avoid construction," said Jackie Koppany of Feelingstone Rock & Bead Shop, gesturing out the front window at heavy machinery and piles of broken asphalt. "I think people look at this and say, 'No thank you.'"

Koppany is one of several businesses with storefronts between Southwest First and Southwest Third streets on Hermiston Avenue. The stretch of road, torn up last week, is expected to stay closed until the end of September for a complete overhaul of street and sidewalk. The city's water department also took advantage of the project to get in and install new water valves.

All of the businesses remain open, and many have side or back entrances for customers parking in the back. But Koppany said it's hard for casual shoppers to figure out how to get in, causing traffic through her front door to be "slower than crap."

"I'm making another sandwich sign," she said. "I put a sign on



Staff photo by Ben Loneragan

Road Construction is underway on Hermiston Avenue leaving businesses along the street without sidewalks or parking along the two block stretch of Hermiston Avenue.

my truck saying we're still open. I'm doing everything I can to let people know."

Since U.S.A. Subs doesn't have a back or side entrance, people must walk out onto a dirt path along the side of the building. On Monday around lunch time, a couple of customers hovered at the side, unsure of whether they were allowed to step onto the construction site. One family asked a nearby worker how to get in.

Cindy Littlefield of U.S.A. Subs said business has still been steady, however.

"Most people think it's worth it," she said.

The restaurant has started allowing customers to call in orders and have staff run it out to their car in the back parking lot so they don't have to walk through the dirt to pick it up.

The parking lot service has been so popular that she said they

will probably continue it after the road is put back together.

"Sometimes when you have to think outside the box, it's good," she said.

Littlefield had no complaints about the city or contractors, who she said had been great about communicating every step of the way. The old sidewalk outside the building was a "wreck," she said, so it was worth the hassle to get a new one.

Last week, the city posted a plea to Facebook, asking people to make an effort to visit businesses reporting lower customer counts during construction.

"These are your friends and neighbors who sponsor your Little League teams and put up your fundraising flyers in their windows, among the many other great things they do for our community," the post said. "There is lots of parking available behind most of the businesses and on side-streets, so please take the few extra steps to drop in and thank them for what they do for our community by shopping in their stores, because they ARE OPEN."

Holly Keller, cutting hair at the Styling Arena Monday morning, said they were still seeing customers make appointments and use their side entrance off Southwest Second Street.

"People still need their hair done," she said.

Kaylee Field, a sales associate for Walker's Furniture, said that the company's buildings on either side of the street are still open, and fortunately most customers are figuring out how to go down back streets and park.

Corporate is allowing the Hermiston location to offer additional sales not available at any other Walker's locations right now in order to help customers overcome their desire to avoid construction.

"That's keeping our business pretty busy," she said. "Hopefully we get through it."

George Gritz honored for saving friend's life

By JESSICA POLLARD
STAFF WRITER

The morning of July 9 was shaping up to be like any other for George Gritz as he sipped his coffee at the Pheasant Cafe downtown.

But things quickly turned south when a friend of his, Richard Vern, collapsed outside the restaurant.

"I didn't wait," Gritz said.

Immediately, he and several others ran to Vern, who was suffering from cardiac arrest. Gritz turned him onto his back, and started administering chest compressions, fearing the worst.

"It felt like forever, but it was only a few minutes before the fire department came," Gritz said. "Thank God, it worked."

The two know each other from around town, and often spend mornings chatting over breakfast and coffee.

"He is pretty well known around town. And a hell of a nice guy," Gritz said.

Vern stood healthy and tall as he joked with Gritz about their differing political views before a room full of people Wednesday night, when Umatilla County Fire District 1 awarded Gritz a plaque for his actions.

"Nationwide, the rate of people coming back from cardiac arrest is about 10 percent," said UCFD1 Lt. Josh Smith. "Less than half of the time, someone steps in to do something."

Smith was one of the first responders on the scene the morning of the incident.

"We want people to act with CPR," he said.

For Gritz, this wasn't the

first, or even the second time that his CPR training helped save a life.

He received his certification back in the 1980s, when he was working construction in Hermiston. Just a few weeks after finishing his class, a man collapsed at a restaurant in Pendleton and Gritz came to the rescue.

"That restaurant was packed," he said.

But he was the only one to step up and offer assistance.

Years later, it happened again at a restaurant in Portland. And last year, when his late wife collapsed, Gritz administered CPR until first responders came.

"You can't be afraid to step up. If you don't, nobody's willing to. Every time I've been in this position, it's surprised me," he said. "You don't want to panic. What are you going to do wrong?"

BECOMING CPR CERTIFIED

The American Heart Association estimates that 70% of Americans feel incapable of acting during a cardiac emergency because they are not trained in CPR, or their training is out of date. Bystander CPR, according to the organization, can do as much as triple the chance that someone experiencing cardiac arrest survives.

Those interested in becoming CPR certified can call UCFD1 at 541-567-8822 to see about joining a class,

Seventh-day Adventist Church to rebuild

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

The Hermiston Seventh-day Adventist Church is ready to rebuild a year after fire gutted their building on Highland Avenue.

The church plans to tear down the old building and build a slightly larger, more modern-looking church on the same lot. Demolition of the old church will begin in the next two to three weeks. Construction on the new building will take eight to 10 months.

"It's going to be awesome," contractor Mark Black said. "I'm excited about it."

Black, manager of Advantage Construction Management in Walla Walla, is an Adventist himself and was anxious to help the church go through a design-build process that would help them save money and get what they wanted.

"This is a small project for me, but it's very important to me and to the members," he said.

The church burned down in June 2018 due to a lamp left on overnight near a wooden table. Umatilla County Fire District Fire Marshal Scott Goff at the time described it as a "long, slow, smoldering fire that



Staff photo by Jade McDowell

The Hermiston Seventh-day Adventist Church is preparing to demolish their church building that burned in order to construct a new building on the same site.

kind of cooked the whole building." While the building's exterior looks mostly whole, the interior is a mess of charred wood, broken glass and melted plastic that could not be salvaged.

Sid Rittenbach, chairman of the church's building advisory committee, said the Adventists had hoped to tear down the burned building sooner, but had to leave it up until they were done negotiating with the insurance company.

They will get money for replacement costs for the 1960s-era building, but the settlement isn't enough to cover bringing the new building up to modern codes for fire prevention, accessi-

bility and energy efficiency.

Rittenbach said the congregation also plans to add on some extra space, including a fellowship hall with a kitchen that could be used for cooking classes and other health-focused events. There will be classrooms, the large sanctuary, a small chapel for weddings, space outside to resume the annual Journey to Bethlehem pag-

eant and a wide entrance to the grounds located in a safer place than the current Highland Avenue driveway.

"There will be lots of windows to let in natural light," he said.

A large pine tree must be removed to accommodate the construction, and the church hopes to time removal so that it can be used as this year's city Christmas tree on the festival street downtown.

Their goal is to raise about \$700,000 from church members and community donations toward the total project cost of more than \$4 million. People can donate by going to www.hermistonadventist.org, clicking on "Online Giving" and labeling their donation for the "local building fund."

"Adventists are faithful tithe-payers and very benevolent, but this is still a crushing burden for the organization, so it's great when the community recognizes that and steps in," Black said.

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PRIORITIES
A hundred years from now it will not matter what My bank account was, the sort of house I lived in, or the kind of car I drove... but the world may be different because I was important in the Life of a Child.

OREGON REPUBLICAN PARTY DINNER
Saturday, August 24 | 7pm
Pendleton Convention Center
1601 Westgate, Pendleton, OR 97801

The Umatilla County Republican Party is hosting the Oregon Republican Party Platform Convention in Pendleton on Aug. 23-24. We hope Republicans in Umatilla County can join us for the ORP Fundraising dinner with Steve Yates.

Follow us on Facebook: Umatilla County Republican Party

Featuring:
Stephen Yates
CEO of DC International Advisory, former Chairman of the Idaho Republican Party, former Deputy Assistant to the Vice President for National Security Affairs, frequent commentator on Fox News, Fox Business, HNL, and Taiwan's FTV.

Dinner - \$50/person VIP—\$250/person

VIP reception begins at 5:30 and includes pre-dinner reception, pictures with Steve Yates, and dinner.

Get your tickets at www.oregon.gov/steve-yates-2019

Questions? Contact Tracy Honl at tracy.honl@oregon.gov

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